

Message Text

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60

ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 DHA-02 ORM-02 AID-05 /074 W

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R 141130Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8014

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LOME

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 0056

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, DM

SUBJ: POLITICAL PRISONERS RELEASED

REF A - 75 COTONOU 1628, B - 75 COTONOU 1603,

1. SINCE THE WEEKEND OF JAN 3-4, THE BENIN GOVT (GPRB) HAS REPORTEDLY RELEASED ALL BUT A FEW OF THE POLITICAL PRISONERS WHO HAD BEEN ROUNDED UP AS ALLEGED ZIONSOUISTS. MOST HAD BEEN HELD PRISONER SINCE THE WEEKEND OF OCT 18-19 FOLLOWING THE GPRB ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE "DISCOVERY OF A ZINSOUIST COUP PLOT AIMED AT ASSASSINATING KEREKOU, AZONHIHO AND OTHER REVOLUTIONARY LEADERS." THE GOVT HAS ALSO REPORTEDLY RELEASED A FEW OF THE NUMEROUS LABOR LEADERS AND OTHERS JAILED FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE GENERAL STRIKE WHICH FOLLOWED KEREKOU'S MURDER OF HIS INTERIOR MIN MICHEL AIKPE LAST JUNE. MOST REPORTS PUT THE TOTAL NUMBER RELEASED AT 60 TO 100. HOWEVER, IT HAS NOT BEEN POSSIBLE TO VERIFY THESE REPORTS. INTERIM MIN OF SECURITY AND INTERIOR AZONHIHO REPORTEDLY ADDRESSED THE PRISONERS PRIOR TO THEIR RELEASE, TELLING THEM THAT IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN SHOT; THEY WERE LUCKY TO BE LIVING IN A COUNTRY

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WITH SUCH A MAGNANIMOUS GOVT.

2. OF THOSE ALLEGED ZINSOUISTS REMAINING IN PRISON (AT CAMP GUEZO) FIVE NAMES HAVE SURFACED; FORMER COTONOU POLICE CHIEF PASCAL TCHIAKPE; (FNU) D'ALMEIDA, A BANK OFFICIAL; ELIE HOUNKPONOU, A POLICE OFFICIAL (SEE PARA 4 REF A); EMILE OLOUGOUDOU, CAREER DIPLOMAT; AND MARIUS FRANCISCO, DIR OF THE CENTRAL MECANOGRAPHIQUE. ACCORDING TO ONE SOURCE, THE

GOVT HAS COMPLETED ITS INVESTIGATION INTO THE ALLEGED COUP PLOT AND HAS TURNED UP LITTLE OR NO EVIDENCE AGAINST ANY OF THE DETAINEES.

3. COMMENT: THE RELEASE OF A NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS INDICATES THAT THE KEREKOU REGIME IS CONFIDENT THAT THE DANGER OF ACTION BY THE OPPOSITON HAS PASSED AND IT NO LONGER NEEDS TO HOLD SO MANY HOSTAGES. THERE WERE INDICATIONS A MONTH OR SO BACK THAT THE GOVT INTENDED TO EXECUTE SOME OF THE POLITICAL PRISONERS. HOWEVER, IN VIEW OF THE ABSENCE OF ANY PROPAGANDA LATELY AGAINST THOSE STILL HELD, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT AT LEAST FOR THE TIME BEING THE REMAINING POLITICAL PRISONERS WILL BE ALLOWED TO ROT IN JAIL ALONG WITH THOSE CONDEMNED TO DEATH LAST MARCH BY A KANGAROO COURT.

4. IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE "DISCOVERY OF THE COUP PLOT", THE GOVT PROMISED A FULL REPORT ON THE PLOT WITH "UNIMPEACHABLE PROOF." ALL MENTION OF SUCH A REPORT HAS LONG SINCE BEEN DROPPED FROM THE MEDIA. THIS TIME ROUND THE GOVT LACKS ENOUGH "EVIDENCE" EVEN TO STAGE A SHOW TRAIL.
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